



When Your Partner is Struggling

A Case Study of Michelle





When Your Partner is Struggling

A Case Study of Michelle

AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGES

- Societal stigma about non-birthing partners, especially men, needing support
- Lack of resources for non-birthing partners experiencing PMADs, especially in a small town

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amplify conversations about non-birthing partners' experiences throughout the perinatal period
- Include PMADs screening for non-birthing partners
- Create and facilitate equitable access to mental health supports for non-birthing partners

ABOUT THE STUDY

This research is based on in-depth interviews with 17 caregivers across the U.S. who experienced perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

Michelle's Story

As a consultant in the field of education, Michelle was well-prepared for many aspects of pregnancy and early parenthood. However, her experience exposed her to systemic gaps in postpartum care, the lack of mental health screening and support for partners, an oversight that would later impact her family's postpartum experience.

Michelle participated in our recent study on perinatal mental health and brought a wealth of insight into the experiences of caregivers whose partners experience PMADs. With her permission, we highlight her story.

“We know men experience postpartum mental health struggles. Why is it still not part of the standard conversation?”

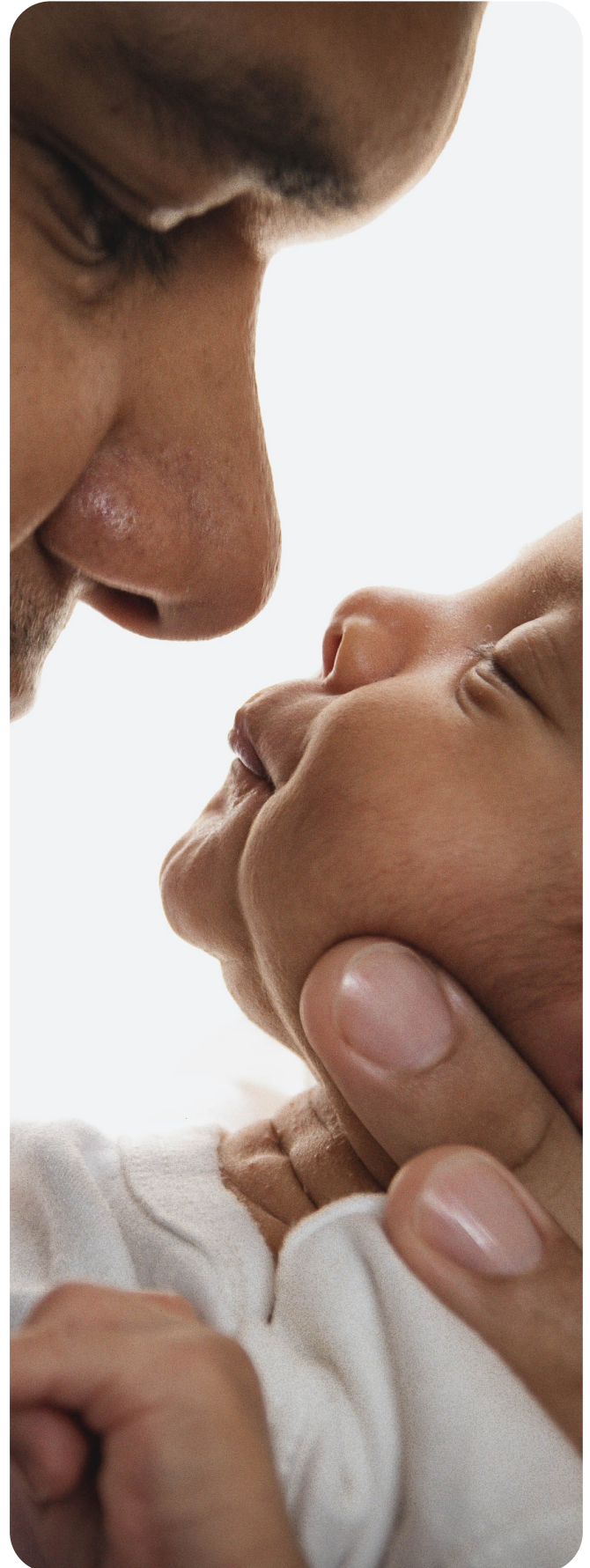
“For three weeks, he didn’t sleep because he was afraid something would happen”

While Michelle’s pediatrician provided attentive care for her baby, her own postpartum checkups felt rushed and superficial. ***“It was just, ‘Are you okay? Do you feel like you don’t love your baby?’”*** she recalls. ***“That’s not a thorough evaluation.”***

Beyond the gaps in her own care, Michelle was alarmed by the absence of partner mental health assessments. Her husband exhibited clear signs of postpartum anxiety, yet no provider screened or even mentioned that he could be at risk.

“Nobody ever asked him how he was doing,” she says. Research shows that between 10% and 25% of partners experience postpartum depression and anxiety, yet these symptoms often go unrecognized (Leach et al., 2022).

Michelle’s husband struggled with severe anxiety, often staying awake for nights on end, worried about their baby. His reluctance to seek help, compounded by societal stigma, further underscored the need for a more inclusive and proactive approach to partner mental health.



Supports & Gaps

Michelle reported that she was able to utilize the following supports during the perinatal period:

- Online parenting forums and evidence-based resources helped her self-educate about postpartum mental health.
- A compassionate pediatrician who provided guidance for her baby's well-being.
- Close-knit community connections that offered emotional support.

“Postpartum mental health isn’t just about mothers. It’s about families.”



She struggled with the following gaps in care:

- Standard postpartum checkups failed to address the depth of Michelle's struggles, relying on limited self-evaluations.
- No providers assessed her husband for anxiety or depression, despite clear symptoms.
- Access to mental health care was restricted, forcing Michelle to seek support through online forums and self-research.
- Michelle recognized that many employers lack policies to support postpartum families, making the transition even more difficult.

“It’s not a mystery. We know what needs to change. We just aren’t doing it.”

Future Directions

Michelle challenges the idea that postpartum mental health is solely a maternal issue. Studies show that untreated partner mental health struggles can negatively impact parenting quality, marital satisfaction, and child development (Rao et al., 2021).

Her advocacy serves as a call to action for medical professionals, employers, and policymakers alike, pushing for a future where every new parent, birthing or not, receives the support they need.

Dedicating more funding for holistic perinatal care could:

- Enhance screening measures
- Improve caregiver relationships with each other and with the newborn
- Increase marital satisfaction
- Decrease stigma around non-birthing caregiver PMADs

The Bottom Line

By investing in holistic PMADs support, we can strengthen the family unit and boost the likelihood of healthy child outcomes.

References:

Goodman, J. H. (2020). Paternal postpartum depression, its relationship to maternal postpartum depression, and implications for family health. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 76(1), 196-208.

Leach, L. S., Mackinnon, A., Poyser, C., Fairweather-Schmidt, A. K. (2022). Partner postpartum mental health: Evidence from longitudinal studies. *Perinatal Mental Health Research*, 14(4), 301-315.

Rao, W., Zhu, Y., & Zhao, H. (2021). Partner mental health and its impact on early parenting: A systematic review. *Parenting Science Review*, 9(2), 123-137.

About Nested

At Nested, we're committed to advancing family well-being through rigorous, impactful research. As a specialized 501(c)(3) nonprofit institute with deep expertise in child development, perinatal mental health, and parenting, **we are accelerating the research-to-action pipeline.**

Methodology

This case study is part of *Missed Screenings, Missed Support*, a national study on perinatal mental health. As part of the research, we conducted one-on-one interviews with caregivers across the United States, each lasting up to two hours. These conversations explored their personal experiences with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, capturing the challenges, support systems, and moments that shaped their journeys.

All names used in this case study are pseudonyms. Any identifying information has also been changed to protect caregiver privacy.



This study was made possible by the generous support of our founding partners, who share our commitment to improving family well-being.

